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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [RU](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: FINI-LAVROV MEETING: RUSSIA CAN PLAY A ROLE IN
MIDDLE EAST, UKRAINE TO BLAME ON GAS CRISIS

Classified By: Classified by David D. Pearce, Political Minister Counse
lor, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Antonio Cascio, an official in the Russia/Central Asian Department of the Italian MFA, told poloff that during a visit to Rome on February 7, Russian FM Lavrov told Italian FM Fini that Russia can play an important and constructive role in the Middle East. Lavrov told Fini the Iranian crisis could be solved through the proposed Russian plan to allow Iranian enrichment efforts to take place on Russian soil. Lavrov was pessimistic that any other approach would succeed. Lavrov also stated that Russia was encouraging President Assad of Syria to cooperate with the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination but feared excessive international pressure could lead to a destabilization of Syria. Lavrov said Russia has a wider array of options in dealing with Hamas since Russia has not declared Hamas to be a terrorist organization. Lavrov blamed the Ukrainian Government for the recent fuel crisis. At a joint press conference later that day, Fini also blamed Ukrainian diversion of fuel destined for Europe as the cause of the problem. Cascio characterized the comments as "unfortunate" since the MFA's reporting and analysis pointed to Russian manipulation of prices and supply to be the primary problem. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 7, Russian FM Lavrov visited Rome to meet with Italian FM Fini. Lavrov told Fini that Russia could play an important and useful role in defusing the Iranian nuclear crisis. Iranian justifications for their program were not credible to the Russian leadership. The Russian Government, however, was convinced that sanctions would only strengthen the Iranian Government and lead to a hardening of the Iranian position. Instead, Russia was seeking support for its plan to undertake Iranian enrichment activities on Russian soil. Fini told Lavrov that at the very least, an international consensus of the problem was being formed.

¶3. (C) Lavrov reportedly told Fini that Russia was taking a pragmatic approach to events in Syria and Palestine. Russia was encouraging President Assad of Syria to cooperate with the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination but warned that the intense international pressure could lead to a destabilization of Syria. On the Palestinian elections, Lavrov believed that Russia could encourage responsible Hamas behavior, since Russia was one of the few countries that has not declared Hamas to be a terrorist organization. Fini told Lavrov that the GOI was also willing to be pragmatic but added that Italy would continue to insist that Hamas renounce terrorism as a political tool and recognize the right of Israel to exist.

¶4. (C) Cascio claimed that Lavrov and Fini were not able to discuss the current disruption of energy supplies during the hour-long meeting, but did discuss it as they walked to the press conference. Lavrov blamed Ukrainian diversion of supplies destined for Europe as the cause of the crisis. As they reached the podium, Fini told reporters that the crisis was not sparked by Russia's unwillingness to comply with existing commitments, but by Ukrainian efforts to divert supplies for their own use. Cascio characterized the remarks as "unfortunate" since MFA reporting and analysis has pointed primarily to Russian political manipulation of supply and price. He had no explanation for Fini's comments.

¶5. (C) Comment: Although the GOI does not absolve Ukraine of all blame, officials at all levels of the MFA agree with the USG assessment that Russia's monopolistic and manipulative behavior as an energy supplier is the primary cause of price fluctuations and supply irregularities. Fini's comments came in the midst of a political campaign season for April 9 national elections, and were likely intended to reach an audience concerned about the status of Italian energy reserves. We reiterated our concerns to Cascio that criticism of Ukraine plays into the hands of the Russians, and we will continue to press that message at all levels.
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